

NOT TO BE PUBLISHED

IN THE COURT OF APPEAL OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
SECOND APPELLATE DISTRICT
DIVISION FOUR

CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY INTERNATIONAL,)
)
Plaintiff and Respondent,)
)
v.)
)
GERALD ARMSTRONG,)
)
Defendant and Appellant.)
_____)

No. B069450

(Super.Ct.No. BC052395)

COURT OF APPEAL - SECOND DIST.

FILED

MAY 16 1994

JOSEPH A. LAWE Clerk
Deputy Clerk

APPEAL from an order of the Superior Court of
Los Angeles County, Ronald M. Sohigian, Judge. Affirmed.

Ford Greene and Paul Morantz for Defendant and
Appellant.

Bowles & Moxon, Karen D. Holly, Wilson, Ryan &
Campilongo, Andrew H. Wilson, Rabinowitz, Boudin, Standard,
Krinsky & Lieberman, Eric M. Lieberman, and Michael Lee
Hertzberg for Plaintiff and Respondent.

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MAY 18 1994

HUB LAW OFFICES

Defendant and appellant Gerald Armstrong (Armstrong) appeals from an order granting a preliminary injunction restraining Armstrong from voluntarily giving assistance to other persons litigating or intending to litigate claims against plaintiff and respondent Church of Scientology International (Church).

The injunction was granted to enforce a settlement agreement in prior litigation between Armstrong and Church. In the settlement, Armstrong agreed he would not voluntarily assist other persons in proceedings against Church.

Armstrong does not deny violating his agreement but asserts numerous reasons why his agreement should not be enforceable. We conclude that the narrowly-limited preliminary injunction, which did not finally adjudicate the merits of Armstrong's claims, was not an abuse of the trial court's discretion to make orders maintaining the status quo and preventing irreparable harm pending the ultimate resolution of the merits.

FACTUAL AND PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

Armstrong was a member of Church between 1969 and 1981. He became an insider of high rank, familiar with Church practices and documents. He became disillusioned and left Church in 1981. When he left, he took many Church documents with him.

The Prior Action and Settlement

Church brought the prior action against Armstrong seeking return of the documents, injunctive relief against further dissemination of information contained in them, and imposition of a constructive trust. Mary Sue Hubbard, wife of Church founder L. Ron Hubbard, intervened asserting various torts against Armstrong. Armstrong filed a cross-complaint seeking damages for fraud, intentional infliction of emotional distress, libel, breach of contract, and tortious interference with contract.

Church's complaint and Hubbard's complaint in intervention were tried in 1984 by Judge Breckenridge. That trial led to a judgment, eventually affirmed on appeal, holding Armstrong's conversion of the documents was justified because he believed the conversion necessary to protect himself from Church's claims that he had lied about Church matters and L. Ron Hubbard. (Church of Scientology v. Armstrong (1991) 232 Cal.App.3d 1060, 1063, 1073.)

Armstrong's cross-complaint in that case was settled in December 1986 by the settlement agreement which is the subject of the injunction in the present case.

In the settlement agreement, the parties mutually released each other from all claims, except the then-pending appeal of Judge Breckenridge's decision on Church's complaint, which was expressly excluded. The settlement involved a number

of persons engaged in litigation against Church, all represented by Attorney Michael Flynn. As a result of the settlement, Armstrong was paid \$800,000. Armstrong's cross-complaint was dismissed with prejudice, as agreed, on December 11, 1986.

The portions of the settlement agreement most pertinent to this appeal are paragraphs 7-G, 7-H, and 10, in which Armstrong agreed not to voluntarily assist other persons intending to engage in litigation or other activities adverse to Church.^{1/}

1. "G. Plaintiff agrees that he will not voluntarily assist or cooperate with any person adverse to Scientology in any proceeding against any of the Scientology organizations, individuals, or entities listed in Paragraph 1 above. Plaintiff also agrees that he will not cooperate in any manner with any organizations aligned against Scientology. [¶] H. Plaintiff agrees not to testify or otherwise participate in any other judicial, administrative or legislative proceeding adverse to Scientology or any of the Scientology Churches, individuals or entities listed in Paragraph 1 above unless compelled to do so by lawful subpoena or other lawful process. Plaintiff shall not make himself amenable to service of any such subpoena in a manner which invalidates the intent of this provision. Unless required to do so by such subpoena, Plaintiff agrees not to discuss this litigation or his experiences with and knowledge of the Church with anyone other than members of his immediate family. As provided hereinafter in Paragraph 18(d), the contents of this Agreement may not be disclosed. [¶] . . . 10. Plaintiff agrees that he will not assist or advise anyone, including individuals, partnerships, associations, corporations, or governmental agencies contemplating any claim or engaged in litigation or involved in or contemplating any activity adverse to the interests of any entity or class of persons listed above in Paragraph 1 of this Agreement."

Paragraph 20 of the agreement authorizes its enforcement by injunction.

The Present Action

In February 1992, Church filed a complaint in the present action alleging Armstrong's violation of the settlement agreement and seeking damages and injunctive relief.

In support of its motion for a preliminary injunction, Church presented evidence that since June 1991 Armstrong had violated the agreement by working as a paralegal for attorneys representing clients engaged in litigation against Church and by voluntarily and gratuitously providing evidence for such litigation. Armstrong worked as a paralegal for Attorney Joseph Yanny, who represented Richard and Vicki Aznaran in a multimillion dollar suit against Church in federal court. Armstrong also voluntarily provided declarations for use in the Aznarans' case. Armstrong thereafter worked for Attorney Ford Greene on the Aznaran and other Church related matters.

Armstrong did not deny the charged conduct but asserted the settlement agreement was not enforceable for various reasons, primarily that it was against public policy and that he signed it under duress.

The Trial Court's Preliminary Injunction

The trial court granted a limited preliminary injunction, with exceptions which addressed Armstrong's

argument that the settlement agreement violated public policy by requiring suppression of evidence in judicial proceedings.

The court found that Armstrong voluntarily entered the settlement agreement for which he received substantial compensation, and that Armstrong was unlikely to prevail on his duress claim. The court found that Armstrong could contract as part of the settlement to refrain from exercising various rights which he would otherwise have. Balancing the interim harms to the parties, the court found that to the extent of the limited acts covered by the preliminary injunction, Church would suffer irreparable harm which could not be compensated by monetary damages, and harm for which monetary damages would be difficult to calculate. (Code Civ. Proc., § 526, subds. (a)(2), (a)(4), (a)(5).)

The court's order provides, in pertinent part:

"Application for preliminary injunction is granted in part, in the following respects only. [¶] Defendant Gerald Armstrong, his agents, and persons acting in concert or conspiracy with him (excluding attorneys at law who are not said defendant's agents or retained by him) are restrained and enjoined during the pendency of this suit pending further order of court from doing directly or indirectly any of the following: [¶] Voluntarily assisting any person (not a governmental organ or entity) intending to make, intending to press, intending to arbitrate, or intending to litigate a claim against the persons

referred to in sec. 1 of the 'Mutual Release of All Claims and Settlement Agreement' of December, 1986 regarding such claim or regarding pressing, arbitrating, or litigating it. [¶]

Voluntarily assisting any person (not a governmental organ or entity) arbitrating or litigating a claim against the persons referred to in sec. 1 of the 'Mutual Release of All Claims and Settlement Agreement' of December, 1986."

The court provided the following exceptions to address Armstrong's public policy arguments: "The court does not intend by the foregoing to prohibit defendant Armstrong from: (a) being reasonably available for the service of subpoenas on him; (b) accepting service of subpoenas on him without physical resistance, obstructive tactics, or flight; (c) testifying fully and fairly in response to properly put questions either in deposition, at trial, or in other legal or arbitration proceedings; (d) properly reporting or disclosing to authorities criminal conduct of the persons referred to in sec. 1 of the 'Mutual Release of All Claims and Settlement Agreement' of December, 1986; or (e) engaging in gainful employment rendering clerical or paralegal services not contrary to the terms and conditions of this order."

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DISCUSSION

The grant of a preliminary injunction does not adjudicate the ultimate rights in controversy between the parties. It merely determines that the court, balancing the relative equities of the parties, concludes that, pending a trial on the merits, the defendant should be restrained from exercising the right claimed. The purpose of the injunction is to preserve the status quo until a final determination of the merits of the action. (Continental Baking Co. v. Katz (1968) 68 Cal.2d 512, 528.)

The court considers two interrelated factors. The first is the likelihood the plaintiff will prevail at trial. The second is the interim harm the plaintiff is likely to sustain if the injunction is denied, as compared to the harm the defendant is likely to suffer if the injunction is granted. (Cohen v. Board of Supervisors (1985) 40 Cal.3d 277, 286.)

The decision to grant or deny a preliminary injunction rests in the discretion of the trial court. Accordingly, an appellate court's review on appeal from the granting of a preliminary injunction is very limited. The burden is on the appellant to make a clear showing that the trial court abused its discretion. (IT Corp. v. County of Imperial (1983) 35 Cal.3d 63, 69; Nutro Products, Inc. v. Cole Grain Co. (1992) 3

Cal.App.4th 860, 865.) Abuse of discretion means the trial court has exceeded the bounds of reason or contravened the uncontradicted evidence. (IT Corp. v. County of Imperial, supra, 35 Cal.3d at p. 69.)

Here, the trial court's memorandum decision reflects very careful consideration of the factors relevant to the granting of a preliminary injunction. The court weighed the relative harms to the parties and balanced the interests asserted by Armstrong. The court granted a limited preliminary injunction with exclusions protecting the countervailing interests asserted by Armstrong. We find no abuse of discretion. We cannot say that the trial court erred as a matter of law in weighing the hardships or in determining there is a reasonable probability Church would ultimately prevail to the limited extent reflected by the terms of the preliminary injunction.

Although Armstrong's "freedom of speech" is affected, it is clear that a party may voluntarily by contract agree to limit his freedom of speech. (See In re Steinberg (1983) 148 Cal.App.3d 14, 18-20 [filmmaker agreed to prior restraint on distribution of film]; ITT Telecom Products Corp. v. Dooley (1989) 214 Cal.App.3d 307, 319 [employee's agreement not to disclose confidential information; "it is possible to waive even First Amendment free speech rights by contract"]; Snepp v. United States (1980) 444 U.S. 507, 509, fn. 3 [book by CIA

employee subject to prepublication clearance by terms of his employment contract].)

The exceptions in the trial court's injunction assured that the injunction would not serve to suppress evidence in legal proceedings. The injunction expressly did not restrain Armstrong from accepting service of subpoenas, testifying fully and fairly in legal proceedings, and reporting criminal conduct to the authorities. (See Philippine Export & Foreign Loan Guarantee Corp. v. Chuidian (1990) 218 Cal.App.3d 1058, 1081-1082.) This contrasts with the stipulation in Mary R. v. B. & R. Corp. (1983) 149 Cal.App.3d 308, 315-316, cited by Armstrong, which prevented a party from disclosing misconduct to regulatory authorities.

This appeal is only from the granting of a preliminary injunction which expressly did not decide the ultimate merits. As limited by the trial court here, the preliminary injunction merely restrains, for the time being, Armstrong's voluntary intermeddling in other litigation against Church, in violation of his own agreement. We decline any extended discussion of Armstrong's shotgun-style brief, which offers more than a dozen separate contentions against enforcement. It suffices to say that Armstrong has not borne his burden on appeal to demonstrate a clear abuse of discretion.

DISPOSITION

The order granting a preliminary injunction is affirmed.

NOT TO BE PUBLISHED

VOGEL (C.S.), Acting P.J.

We concur:

HASTINGS, J.

KLEIN (Brett), J.*

*Assigned by the Chairperson of the Judicial Council.